8 October 2014 - Greg Clark, Minister for Universities, Science and Cities, is opening the UK's only dedicated space weather forecast centre today.

The centre is a key milestone in the protection of the UK economy and infrastructure from the real threat of severe space weather events.

The Met Office Space Weather Centre, based at the Met Office's headquarters in Exeter, is the culmination of more than three years work to combine the space weather resources and scientific expertise of the UK and USA and was made possible by £4.6 million funding from Government.

It is operational 24/7 providing space weather forecasts and developing an early warning system aimed at protecting critical infrastructure from the impacts of space weather.

Prime Minister David Cameron and US President Barack Obama highlighted the countries' space weather partnership in London in May 2011, and again at the White House in March 2012.

Universities, Science and Cities Minister Greg Clark said:"The Met Office Space Weather Centre is a clear demonstration of how the UK is a world leader in space weather. Not only will it help us to guard against the impact of space weather, but its capabilities will mean benefits for British businesses like those in the space industry and the wider economy."

Met Office Space Weather Business Manager Mark Gibbs said: "The Met Office Space Weather Operations Centre is the culmination of more than three years' work drawing on the collective resources and expertise of the UK and USA. It's a new, emerging and exciting area of science where understanding is growing rapidly.

"Space weather is an all encompassing term covering the near-Earth impact of solar flares, geomagnetic storms and coronal mass ejections (CMEs) from the sun. The impact these have on Earth is becoming ever more important as we become more reliant on technology."

Laura Furgione, deputy director, NOAA's National Weather Service, said: "Accurately predicting and preparing for the impacts from space weather requires a commitment similar to terrestrial weather forecasting and preparedness. Our countries' collaborative efforts will help to promote preparedness and resilience to protect critical infrastructure against the growing and evolving global impacts from space weather."

Space weather is the identified as the 4th most important risk listed on the UK National Risk Register . The centre will be pivotal in protecting the UK economy and infrastructure."

To deliver this the Met Office is working closely with a range of partners including National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Space Weather Prediction Centre, Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), British Geological Survey (BGS), University of Bath , RAL Space, British Antarctic Survey and several other universities and research organisations to optimise the use of data, knowledge and models.

The Met Office is working closely with a number of industries identify the threat, the possible impacts and the mitigation of risk. There are specific areas that are more exposed to the threat including:-

- Power grid outages
- Disruption to GNSS/GPS systems
- HF radio comms outages
- Satellite damage
- Increased radiation threat at high altitude

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